

**Interview with Lily Houseman**  
**Conducted by Sue Kovach Shuman and Linda Byrne for the**  
**Providence District History Project Providence Perspective**

**Sue:** We are speaking to Lily Houseman, Linda Byrne and Sue Kovach Shuman are doing the interview on January 11, 2008. We are going to be taking a look back at Providence District compiling information from long time residents about what was here in the district before all the development that took place now.

Would you tell me specifically your name and where you were born?

**Lily:** My name is Lily Houseman I was born in South Dakota in 1918.

**Sue:** When did you move to this area?

**Lily:** I moved to Falls Church in 1949, and I had lived in Arlington since 1946 and in the District since 1944.

**Sue:** What brought you to the Washington area?

**Lily:** My husband was working here.

**Sue:** And we see that you are now a resident of the Virginian. How long have you been a resident of the Virginian?

**Lily:** I have been there for 19 and one half years.

**Sue:** Wow! It has been there for 25 years so you were pretty much in on the ground floor. Could you tell me a little bit about before the Virginian? About, what this area was like where you lived in Falls Church, what your house was like, what your neighbors were like.

**Lily:** I lived on Hillwood Avenue in Falls Church, in the city just four houses from Roosevelt Street. The house I think had probably been built in 1937 and it was on a street where there was one similar house, but most of the houses were individual. I came there with two little girls and a boy who was born in 1951. There was a Navy Captain living on one side of me, on the other side various people moved in and out. A new house was built across the street while we were there.

**Sue:** So it was an area of young families for the most part?

**Lily:** Well no, not really it was quite a mixed neighborhood. We had no sidewalks. There were people with young families who lived behind us on Broad Street. We were just one block wide at that point, we were two lots wide actually so our back yards met with people on Broad Street.

**Sue:** Did your children attend public school?

**Lily:** Yes they did. They attended Madison School in Falls Church, which is gone now and then they went to George Mason High School and all three of them graduated from George Mason.

**Sue:** Do they live in the area?

**Lily:** One of them still lives here in Annandale; one lives in Minneapolis, MN and the other in Pontiac, MI.

**Sue:** Tell me a little bit about what changes you have seen in this area.

**Lily:** Well, when we moved here Seven Corner's hadn't been built yet, so we lived through that. We lived through the changes in Rt. 50, the over pass between Rt. 50 and the access road to Rt. 50 on the other side. Loehmann's Plaza was a little airport. There were the igloo houses on Lee Highway.

**Sue:** What's an igloo house?

**Lily:** Well, they were houses that were made over a balloon, I think and they looked like igloos. There were single ones and there were double ones with a little entry way in-between. I had friends who lived in one of them. I don't know what they called them – I called them igloo houses.

**Linda:** I had seen them back then yes, and you are right I do recall something about a balloon structure and was it concrete?

**Sue:** Yes, it was concrete poured over it and very peculiar looking.

**Linda:** As a child, I remember seeing them.

**Sue:** So were these made in the 1950's when Fairfax started growing?

**Sue:** I think they were there before the 1950's although I am not absolutely certain, I am not sure they were there. We moved to Falls Church in '49 and I think they were there then, but I am not positive because time has sort of collapsed and I don't remember when they took them down. They built the condominiums, well apartments there, I don't know if they were condominiums yet or not, but the block of apartments came in there instead but I am not sure when that happened.

**Sue:** When you moved here, was there a lot of open space and not as much development?

**Lily:** Yes, out here absolutely. Tyson's Corner wasn't built yet and on Rt. 7 just beyond what is now Tyson's Corner there was a meat bus. A bus that sold meat, a butcher shop and it was called Fleegers and we always called it Fleegers meat bus and the children were intrigued by that.

**Sue:** Was that a home delivery?

**Lily:** No it was stationary thing but it occupied a bus and I think the nursery was across the street then.

**Sue:** The nursery at what location?

**Lily:** Just beyond Tyson's Corner on Rt. 7. The nursery is no longer there. I think it was called Capper's

**Sue:** It might be the large Merrifield Garden Center.

**Lily:** No, it is not the Merrifield Garden Center, no, no, no.

**Sue:** Okay. What is your fondest memory of living in this area? What kind of memories that you would say that make this place special?

**Lily:** The interesting thing for me is really that I lived in Falls Church for 20 years and it seemed like 20 years. My children grew up there and went to school then we moved to Annandale and I lived there for 19 years and that seemed like half the time that we were in Falls Church and then I moved to the Virginian and I have been there for 19 years and that was only a quarter as long, so time has just collapsed.

I enjoyed living in Falls Church and I enjoyed having a smaller school system, which was nice. I was a homemaker for most of the time. I went back to school to American University and got a Master's Degree in American History and then I taught for 8 years in Fairfax County at Whittier Intermediate, which at that time was where Falls Church High is now. It was a new school on Marc Drive and while we were there they converted it into a high school, so for at least a full year we had chain saws on the outside and a great deal of commotion going on. We then switched buildings so that for the rest of the time that I taught it was in the old Falls Church High School building on Cherry Street in Falls Church city. That is a half a mile from where I lived, so I could walk to school then.

**Sue:** Do you keep in touch with any students?

**Lily:** Occasionally I see someone in church, I don't keep in touch with them but I was also a Camp Fire Leader so I do keep in touch with some of my Camp Fire girls.

**Sue:** Now they have their own families?

**Lily:** Oh yes.

**Sue:** Where were you a Camp Fire Leader?

**Lily:** In Falls Church.

**Sue:** And the time would be approximately?

**Lily:** I was a Camp fire leader from 1953 to 1961 until my girls were in high school and then they formed a Horizon Club, which was the older group and their favorite math teacher became their leader.

**Sue:** What kind of things did you do as their Camp Fire Leader?

**Lily:** Oh, we went camping sometimes.

**Sue:** Where?

**Lily:** Shenandoah National Park, we spent a rather horrendous overnight there out in the open, we didn't have tents or anything. We went camping up to Harper's Ferry on a farm where we had tents but we had cows also. Of course we did all kind of craft things, and went places like Arlington Cemetery and had little field trips. And the girls made displays that we had down at the mall at the Christmas season when they had various places where you could display your work. We sold peanuts and candy all over.

**Sue:** Virginia peanuts?

**Lily:** Well, I don't know if they were Virginia peanuts, but we had our annual peanut sale. First we were selling a candy that looked like pillows filled with a peanut buttery inside. I don't see them much around, but they were very good. I miss them, and then we had peanuts.

**Sue:** You had mentioned that you had belonged to a church.

**Lily:** I belonged and still do to Dulin United Methodist Church, I have been there since 1957, when I first came we lived in Arlington I belonged to Clarendon Methodist and eventually moved to Dulin in Falls Church which was within walking distance. But, I was active in Clarendon when I was there and so it took some time to move.

**Sue:** Are you active in the church now?

**Lily:** Not now, but I have been and I have done everything in the church. I was the Chairman of the Administrative Board and I think I was the second woman to hold that position. I was church Lay Leader (congregational representative) and had many other offices in the church and I have been President and held other offices in the Arlington District United Methodist Women.

**Sue:** What kind of activities?

**Lily:** It's a mission church. We study missions; we support missions both here and overseas, that kind of thing. We also have ESL (English as a Second Language) classes. I started the program at Dulin United Methodist Church in 1991. It has grown a lot.

**Sue:** Can you tell me what a typical day was like when your children were home?

When they were small or teenagers?

**Lily:** When they were small, my girls were 15 months apart and they were both in school by the time their brother was born, so I would get them off to school and take care of the young one and when he was 3 or 4, I became a Camp Fire Leader and we had weekly meetings. My church work I usually did in the evenings and my husband would baby-sit.

**Sue:** Do you have friends or relatives that live in this area?

**Lily:** I have a lot of friends, but I don't have any relatives except for the ones I have produced myself.

**Sue:** Tell me a little bit about what shopping was like; Tyson's Corner was not here of course.

**Lily:** Tyson's Corner was not here, Seven Corners wasn't there when we came so of course the metropolis we went to was Clarendon and while we were living here Parkington was established and that was the first shopping mall in the area. It is no longer Parkington the shopping mall is now known as Ballston and located at Glebe Road and Wilson Blvd.

**Sue:** For general shopping for clothing?

**Lily:** For clothing and the grocery store, the first Giant was down on Wilson Blvd farther east than Clarendon. Then while we were living on Hillwood Avenue they built a Giant there, which is now an International Store. The Giant closed a couple of years ago.

**Sue:** So your shopping was not done right here in the district because there was nothing here at the time.

**Lily:** No, that's right. There was a little Mom and Pop store on Hillwood Avenue just on the other side of Roosevelt Street.

**Sue:** They had just a generic or general store?

**Lily:** It was mostly a little grocery store. **Sue:** Okay.

**Lily:** A Giant grocery store was opened in 1950 or 51 and they had quite a grand opening and they had an artist there who drew sketches of my girls, which I still have. So then I became a Giant shopper and still go to the Giant frequently. I was rather sad when they closed it and then when they closed the one at Yorktown I was even more distressed because that's where my bank is and drugstore and so on. But they have opened an International Store there now, which is kind of nice.

**Sue:** Were there Farmer's Markets here back in the 60's?

**Lily:** Not especially.

**Sue:** Vendors who brought vegetables or anything like that?

**Lily:** No, I don't recall any, but I do know we would go out to the little peach orchards and buy peaches in season and freeze them.

**Sue:** Where was that?

**Lily:** It was out Rt. 7. I don't know the name of the owner but the peach orchard name was Moutoux and I don't know if he is still in business or not.

**Sue:** Would it be a family excursion to go out and pick peaches?

**Lily:** Yea, we didn't pick the peaches, but we would buy them there and we would freeze them. There were some fruit and vegetable stands. My son-in-law is a brother of Bill Meadows of Meadows Farms and Bill started with a fruit stand on Rt. 7 way back then. They have increased of course mightily; so that they are the first fruit and vegetable stands that I know of, there probably were others around but I am not aware of them.

**Sue:** So that would have been in what year approximately?

**Lily:** Let's see, the first fruit stand was probably in the early 60's.

**Sue:** Okay in the 60's. Now you mentioned you went to get peaches and freeze them, did you can them?

**Lily:** I didn't can, I froze. It was a lot of work. I grew up on a farm so I was familiar with canning but I wasn't very helpful to my mother. So, I wasn't accustomed to and the only canning I ever did was in Home Ec classes when I was in high school.

**Sue:** You didn't like that?

**Lily:** No, I did not like that. I am not particularly domestic.



**Sue:** You mentioned that you went back to American University and have a History Degree and you were teaching then. Have you done research into Providence District history?

**Lily:** No I really haven't, just for the Virginian.

**Sue:** Well, this book, which I guess we will be looking at later, tell me a little about how the Virginian has changed. You have been here 19 years you said?

**Lily:** Yes I have.

**Sue:** How have things changed there?

**Lily:** Well, it has expanded physically and it opened in December of 1980. They had been building it for however long it takes to build before that. There was a building, the front part right there, was Phase I of the building. Phase II was a wing on the East side and was built in 1986 and completed. Phase III, and I live in that, was completed in 1988. It wasn't quite done when we moved in, I was living in the new part but we were still being built around and the public rooms downstairs weren't open. Our assembly room and so on weren't open until after we lived there for several months. We still had all of the activities (programs, Vespers, bazaar, etc). So I did have kind of an experience of being where we still had all of the new things in the dining room. Now we have a large assembly room and we had a library and other facilities in the very front building the first phase of the building and most of those were moved to the third phase wing on a lower level.

The biggest change that has come about is the age of the residents. When we moved in the average age was probably 75 and it is now 87. I think that when we moved in there were very few adult independent living homes in the area, there was the Goodwin House in Alexandria; and the Methodist Home called the Hermitage also was available. The Jefferson in Clarendon was just beginning to be established, they had sent out their brochures but they hadn't done anything about it yet. Leisure World in Maryland was an Independent Living place, but it didn't have a lot of things that the Virginian

has. The Virginian is a Continuing Care Facility. Although it was built for independent living, it has an infirmary for residents when they became ill.

Some time in the early 90's a section of apartments on the first floor were changed to Assisted Living. Two more Assisted Living sections have been added. When Phase 2, the East wing, was built in 1986, two more "infirmary sections" were added, and the name changed to "Health Care" centers. The Virginian now has three levels of accommodations: Independent Living, Assisted Living, and health Care (nursing centers). We have about 200 people in Independent Living and possibly 60 or 70 in Assisted Living and more than that in Health Care, so we have about 340 or 350 people now. So that there are many more people who are elderly, and of course we are all getting older, I am 19 years older than I was when I moved in.

**Sue:** What is your age?

**Lily:** I am 89. I was 70 when we moved in and my husband and I had moved in together. He had had kidney cancer and an unfortunate blood transfusion that gave him hepatitis and ruined his liver and pancreas so that he became insulin dependent for the rest of his life. It became difficult for him to maintain the house so we moved in; I was 70 and he was 73 which was more or less the average age of people coming in.

**Sue:** Now you said 87 is the average age now?

**Lily:** Now, we have a lot of people in their 90's and we have people over 100. We had two who died at 102, not too long ago, so it's an elderly population. When I moved in, you had to walk in and you weren't supposed to be having assistance to do so. Now, I would say at least half of our people use walkers and some are in wheel chairs, even in the Independent Living section so that's a big difference in the way it was.

**Sue:** Do some residents still drive?

**Lily:** Oh, a lot of us still drive. I still drive or I wouldn't be here, (meaning Supervisor Smyth's office) parked in the wrong place but.

**Linda:** We all do that.

**Sue:** I would like to switch gears a little bit. Can you tell me a little bit about what major event, within your lifetime, impacted you the most, for instance World War II, Depression or anything else that may have happened?

**Lily:** Well, I grew up in the Depression, of course, so I still have the Depression mentality.

**Sue:** What does that mean?

**Lily:** That means I look very carefully at prices and I am reluctant to spend money. My husband and I for example, never charged anything, except our house, we had a mortgage. When we bought a new car, it was always for cash. I have a credit card, one, that I pay every month. I don't go to Starbucks.

**Sue:** Tell me a little bit about the mortgage, with housing prices of course what they are today.

**Lily:** Well, when we bought a house it cost us \$10,000.

**Sue:** That is the one in Falls Church.

**Lily:** No, that was in Arlington.

**Sue:** Okay.

**Lily:** Our father, my husband's father loaned us the money to buy it, so that was an in house mortgage you might say. We moved to Falls Church three years later and paid \$21,500 for the house on Hillwood Avenue.

**Sue:** What kind of house? Three bedroom, what?

**Lily:** It was a three-bedroom house with 1 ½ baths and a walk up attic. I loved that walk up attic and a paneled basement, a very nice house.

**Sue:** And for that house you took out a mortgage, not just a loan?

**Lily:** Yes, we had a mortgage on that house, but we paid it off before long. We sold it in 1969 for \$37,500 and bought a house in Annandale for \$40,000 or something like that.

**Sue:** In 1969?

**Lily:** Yes, in 1969. Which we sold to our daughter in 1988 for \$100,000 which was somewhat less than what houses were selling for, at that time.

**Sue:** Does she still own the house?

**Lily:** Yes and it's all paid for.

**Sue:** So you have passed that down.

**Lily:** Right.

**Sue:** Tell me what you think about development in the area in general.

**Lily:** Well, we could come out Lee Highway and this was nothing, all open space. For many years, when I was living in Falls Church and the children were little I had a babysitter who lived on Gallows Road and it was way out in the country.

As a matter of fact one of the babysitters was a child of the people who owned the land that the Virginian is built on which I thought was quite interesting. In my little forward, (referring to a yearbook titled "The Virginian" and edited by Lily) I mention that, there is a preface of sorts.

**Sue:** Since there was not a lot in this area then, did you also go to restaurants in Arlington?

**Lily:** We didn't go to restaurants very much. There was a Howard Johnson's built in the corner where Hillwood and Rt. 50 come together, which was built while we were there. And I suppose we went there on occasion. Evan's Farm Inn was thriving at that time, and there were also many Hot Shoppes.

**Sue:** On special occasions?

**Lily:** Yes. There was a Chinese Restaurant on Broad Street in Falls Church that we liked. It was a very nice little restaurant, but it is not there anymore either. But otherwise we are just not restaurant people.

**Sue:** What did your family do for vacations or?

**Lily:** For vacations we usually went west to visit the grandparents. My husband was from Iowa and I was from South Dakota so we spent a lot of time on Rt. 40 and Rt. 50 going west.

**Sue:** Did you take your children to museums downtown?

**Lily:** Yes we went to museums. We particularly liked the programs at Carter-Baron in Rock Creek Park. They still go on and we went there quite frequently. We visited all of the museums frequently and we went to places like the Arboretum, the gardens, Mt. Vernon historic places. Of course, we went to the Washington Monument grounds for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July fireworks every year. My children loved to go to Arlington Cemetery to visit the Lee house because they had a play room there which they called their gazing room and they would stand at the door and look at all the toys; which was fun.

**Sue:** That sounds like fun.

**Lily:** It was fun and the Camp Fire Girls like to go their too, when they were Blue Birds especially.

**Sue:** Do you have grandchildren?

**Lily:** I have five grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

**Sue:** Have you gone with them to some of the local parks?

**Lily:** With my grandchildren yes, but my great grandchildren are very small and two live in Charlottesville and two in Harrisonburg so I haven't done anything with them. We visited the Zoo of course and there the children particularly liked the Prairie Dogs.

**Sue:** They are cute.

**Lily:** Which was fun.

**Sue:** Is there anything you want to tell me about that I didn't ask specifically -questions about this area, the changes you are seeing, that you have seen, and your impressions of development or life in general?

**Lily:** Well you know for three years we lived in Arlington on Kentucky Street in Westover and all the time we were there people were trying to get Rt. 66 built and the Beltway and it took a long time. Eventually they had condemned houses along the streets; a couple of them. And we lived on a dead end street, well it wasn't a dead end, it came to a stop and turned so it wasn't exactly a dead end but the ravine was beyond us, where Rt. 66 now runs. But, I don't recall just when Rt. 66 came there and of course the Beltway was built and that is when we were living in Falls Church and I remember being on it as soon as it opened. Quite different, people weren't going 70 miles per hour on it yet.

**Sue:** Do you drive on the Beltway?

**Lily:** Oh yes.

**Sue:** Do you like it?

**Lily:** I don't particularly like it that much but I have done it all its' life so I am not afraid of it. I don't like to enter it from in the fast lane and I don't

come from Rt. 66 onto Rt. 50. I mean onto the Beltway to get to Rt. 50, that I won't do because I hesitate to enter it from the left. Aside from that I am not worried about it.

It seems to me that eventually we are going to be completely built up; from here to Leesburg for example was nice open country and now it is not nice open country it is built up completely almost, and that has been a big thing. Tyson's Corner was built then Tyson's II was built and all of the construction there.

**Sue:** Do you shop at the Tyson's?

**Lily:** I use to, now I don't go shopping much. I have become a catalogue person.

**Sue:** On line?

**Lily:** Well on line occasionally.

**Sue:** Are many of the residents at the Virginian computer users to do this?

**Lily:** Well, I don't know how many but there is a certain group who are and we have a computer room which I suppose at least a dozen people use regularly. I had a computer when I came so I have always been a computer person. I wrote my own family history on the computer and it is an illustrated family history and I printed all 12 copies myself. It took a lot of paper and ink.

**Sue:** What a nice gift for your family.

**Lily:** Well, they got it last Christmas. So, I use the computer all the time and I particularly like it for photos especially now that I have a digital camera. I am the traveler at the Virginian and people say, take lots of pictures, and they seem to enjoy them. I know there are a lot of jokes about slide shows but at the Virginian they rather like mine.

**Sue:** Where do you travel?

**Lily:** I have traveled all over the world. It is a little easier to tell you where I haven't been. I haven't been to Viet Nam - the one place. I use to read Richard Halliburton, who is a travel adventure author, when I was a child and I had a list of places I wanted to go. The Matterhorn was probably the first, the pyramids, Taj Mahal, Parthenon and all of those places, the Great Wall and I have been to all of the places on my list except for Angkor Wat which is in Cambodia. Cambodia was just opened several years ago for tourists and it was just past my knees. I have arthritis rather badly in my knees so I don't walk with ease or climb stairs anymore so I decided that Angkor Wat was not for me.

But, I still have about 30 slideshows that I still show even though they are not absolutely new. My last trip was in 2006 when one of my friends from the Virginian and I went on a river cruise in Holland during Tulip time. So that was the last one.

**Sue:** Do you have any planned now?

**Lily:** No, I spent two weeks at Christmas and New Years with my son in Michigan, but aside from visiting family I don't have any plans.

**Sue:** Are the slide shows real? What format are they in that you show? You said they are slides?

**Lily:** They are slides and I narrate them. I am pretty good at narrating.

**Sue:** I would think so. Linda, is there anything you would like to ask?

**Linda:** You are leading such a fabulous, interesting life - your career and teaching history and living it and traveling with it and the slide shows, fascinating. I would like to see the book and some of the pictures you have done. I don't know if it is possible to get a copy that we could put with your file that would go into the Virginia Room.

**Lily:** Well, not really it is pretty thick. Actually I have mine in two volumes. For my children I was making them in two volumes and for my



grandchildren they happen to be in one volume which happens to be this thick. You can come over the Virginian to see them if you like.

**Linda:** What I would like to do is maybe borrow one and make a copy of a couple of the pages.

**Lily:** Alright, you can do that. That would be fine.

**Linda:** Thank you very much.

**Additional information added to interview:**

**Sue:** Your husband was a statistician at the Agriculture Department?

**Lily:** Yes and he was working at the time and at the Iowa State College it started and they were working on a master's sample for agriculture. At that time sampling hadn't really blossomed. It was the time, he was in the draft of course and periodically we got an update. He was always listed as, anyway he was exempted every time. We always were worried that the next time he would be called up, but he never was because it was considered of great importance, and I guess it is. Several years ago, a statistical laboratory was established by the Department of Agriculture that has his name Houseman and the name of his companion Huddleston.

**Sue:** What exactly is a master sample?

**Lily:** I can't exactly explain it, although I have live with it for a long time, because statistics are not my thing. But, they do crop reporting and things like that, I honestly don't know.

We have printed information about the "Houseman-Huddleston Statistics Library".

But, statistics became very important and at that time we did not have computers until I guess probably in the 1950's. He went up to Poughkeepsie, I think to IBM to learn how to work a computer and those were the days when they had those punch cards.

The first computer at the Department of Agriculture was a whole room with great big machines.

**Sue:** My husband worked on computers and I remember the punch cards I met him on campus and he would be hauling those great big boxes of those things.